The Science of Baseball

TOUCHING SECOND

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CHAPTER XII.

UMPIRING.

...ence, in spite of the theory upon ...baseball is conducted, and the ...nt belief of spectators, are hu- ...beings, endowed with sensibilities. ...can feel such emotions as anger, ...ent and revenge; their systems ...ble of suffering pain, surprise, ...even acute mental torture. Um- ...the officials to the contrary) are ...to hinder, to be carried away ...judice, by desire for revenge, and ...than likely to become confused by ...the heckling of players or spec- ...and to blunder worse and worse. ...may even be dishonest. They ...only human.

...baseball, as an institution, is ...dependent upon the honesty, cour- ...and fairness of umpires than upon ...other element in the game. One ...ent or dishonest official, or one ...lent passions who permits per- ...animosity, or his sense of wrong, ...ence him, can mar an entire sea- ...the chances of one or more ...and perhaps give the champion- ...a club not deserving the honor. ...ware of these facts, the rulers ...ball have adopted an extraor- ...code; first, that the umpire al- ...right; second, that those who ...with him are "anarchists;" ...that all criticism of umpires ...cease "for the good of the ..." The rulers of baseball are ...and have striven for years to ...all forces with the umpire, to ex- ...his already dangerous power, and ...the players and others of the ...of criticism.

...large extent this movement was ...by continual and senseless criti- ...of umpires, which served only to ...the umpiring worse. The estab- ...principle of baseball has been ...matters involving only judg- ...the umpire's decision is final. The ...to make his decisions on matter ...the rules and their interpretation ...appeal and extend their power ...critics, is not of their seek-

...danger lies not with the umpires, ...the powerful financial forces ...organized baseball and the es- ...ment of a system which would ...all criticism and would place ...hands of these men absolute ...to dictate the standing of clubs ...ing the umpires. Those who ...good of the game at heart, and ...of the players, who trust um- ...would not trust the club owners ...within their power to make ...ant races close.

...honesty of umpires, as a class, ...has been questioned. Some have ...ted by prejudices, some by ...motives, but as a body they ...honest and straight as any men ...be found. They are men of ...of mind and character, else ...would not remain in the position ... They are men of courage, ...decision, steady nerves and moral ...to face angry crowds for the ...of principle. But the honesty of ...with fortunes involved has ...attack and there is ample ...that some have attempted to ...umpiring.

...persons, wearied by the sense- ...ping of some writers at the ...have started a movement to ...umpire ignored in all re- ...The danger would lie in leaving ...for the introduction of dis- ...methods. The financial tempta- ...great and should not be in- ...The practice of presidents of ...giving secret instructions to ...umpires is considered a grave ...the game.

...umpire, from being the abused, ...the victim of fanatical frenzy, ...ed in the comic supplements, ...the major leagues at least, be- ...tsar, armed with arbitrary ...to use or misuse, and certain ...support of his league in any ...The only restraint placed upon ...the criticism of the crowd, or ...as the players cannot ad- ...in argument, and to re- ...restraint of publicity would ...a menace in case they either ...prejudiced or revengeful. Umpir- ...is a more important element ...than pitching. It would be ...porting to ignore a bad de- ...won or lost the game for ...during the umpire's feelings ...to fail to mention a home ...because the pitcher might feel

...persons understand the full ex- ...the umpire's power in, and ef- ...baseball. In fully one-third ...games played in major leagues ...season, the umpire can turn ...of one decision. He can make ...contest by his manner of ...the players. Games under ...and hard-workng umpires ...in an average of twenty min- ...than when an incompetent ...handling the teams, and the best ...which to judge the qualifica- ...a man for the position is by ...the playing time of games, ...consideration the rapidity ...the pitchers work. ...conception of an umpire ...an abused individual. This ...of old-time conditions, ...prevail in some minor ...in the old days an umpire, ...with a life insurance policy, took his life in his hands and walked between rows of ranting, raving athletes who, if they did not want to kill him themselves, urged the populace to do it. The education of players to the point where they realized that kicking and abusing the umpire would not win, but tended to turn the decisions against them, was slow. The education of spectators to a sense of fair play above partisanship has been slower. As conditions improved, however, higher and higher types of men entered the umpiring field, until now the salaries and the work attract many clean, decent men who command the confidence and respect of players and spectators.

The great mistake of the officials of the leagues has been upholding the goats as well as the sheep. To a great extent the reformation of the umpiring system, and the steady improvement in deportment of players and the work of the umpires has been due to President B. B. Johnson of the American league, who has either had the luck or the judgment and firmness, to revolutionize conditions existing ten years ago and set an example which all executives have been compelled to follow. His first move was suppression of rowdyism by stern methods, and the suppression of the rowdies at once resulted in better umpiring, and a large increase in the number of desirable men who wanted the positions.

The large majority of umpires are honest and mean to be fair, but, as Umpire Johnstone remarked: "Some umpires have one bad fault, and that is not being able to forget today to morrow." The umpire who remembers is a bad umpire, and it is almost as bad for the player to remember. Tim Hurst had a bad day at Washington, and Joe Cantillion thought he robbed his team of the game. The following day Hurst, willing to forget, walked over to the Washington bench and asked cordially: "Who is your pitcher today, Joe?"

"Guess, damn you," responded the retentive-memoried Cantillion. "That's all you did yesterday," and the trouble was renewed.

Heads of leagues make their serious mistakes in upholding umpires who are palpably wrong. They are compelled to uphold them on all questions of judgment, but to declare the umpire was right in some cases is laughable. There was a case in 1894 in Chicago with Moran umpiring. Corcoran, at short for Cincinnati, picked up a grounder batted by Tinker and threw the ball five feet over Pietz's head, Pietz playing first base. The ball went on to the bleachers, sixty feet away. Peitz jumped, pretended he had caught the ball and Moran called Tinker out. Other players were compelled to hold Tinker to keep him from assaulting the umpire, who ordered him off the field, and ordered all players who talked to him out of the game. Peitz chased the ball around the bleachers, ran back to the bench and touched Tinker.

"Now, Tinker," said Moran, "you are out, anyway." And the decision stood.

In Brooklyn, in 1908, with the score 0 to 0, Brooklyn had runners on second and third bases and two out when the batter missed the third strike. The catcher dropped the ball, but recovered and threw the runner out at first. Two runners crossed the plate, and the umpire permitted both runs to count. But the Chicago club, in an exhibition game at Birmingham, met the worst on record. A runner trying to score with two out in the ninth, was thrown out so far from the plate that he did not slide, but turned and ran through the diamond to the bench. The umpire called him out, but when Manager Vaughan protested the runner had not been touched, the umpire lost his head. The runner in the meantime had gone into the dressing room, had his shirt off, and was starting to wash. When notified of the situation he put his shirt on, ran under the stand, climbed through a box, ran behind the catcher, after two balls had been pitched to the next batter, and when he touched the plate the umpire allowed the score and tied the game.

To uphold decisions of that sort is to put a premium either upon dishonesty or incompetence.

One of the greatest examples of individual heroism the game has known was that of Henry O'Day in the historic game between New York and Chicago on September 23, 1908, when Merkle forgot to touch second base. Ten days previous to this game O'Day had been umpiring at Pittsburg and missed the same play, turning away to get a drink and failing to see Gill, the runner, who forgot to go to the base. In New York when the hit was made that sent home what seemed the winning run, the crowd surrounded the field, swarmed upon it. O'Day, remembering the Pittsburg play, raced nearly to second base, saw Merkle turn and go to the club house, saw Evers with the ball on the base. "The run doesn't count," he said—just as the crowd swarmed over him. For 200 feet he walked through a raging mob, telling them the run did not count, while they shrieked, struck at him, pulled him and threatened his life.

Even after New York claimed the game and the entire country was aroused over the situation, O'Day could have ended the trouble with a word and given New York the pennant. He knew the National league wanted New York to win. He knew the Giants ought to have won, that the hit was clean and one that deserved to bring home the winning run. Even when officers, politicians, men big in baseball, urged him to say he had not seen the play, had not made a decision, he stood firm. It was said O'Day would be mobbed if ever he went on to the Polo grounds again, but when he next appeared he was greeted with cheers that showed the admiration of the fans for his courage.

There are weak umpires and strong ones. The weakest is the "Homer" who gives all close decisions to the home club. But the "Homer" is not as bad as his antithesis, the "bullhead," who gives all close decisions against the home club for fear he will be called a "Homer."

With all their mistakes, prejudices and human weaknesses, the umpires have a smaller percentage of errors than the players. As an experiment, I. E. Sanborn ("Cy") of the Chicago Tribune, kept accurate score of all decisions made in a number of games. When in doubt, he questioned umpires and players in regard to the decisions. He found that the umpires averaged about .970 per cent right and that even then some of the decisions scored against them might have been given either way without injustice. The good umpire is not palpably wrong in more than 35 cases in a thousand, although, of course, he may have a bad day, just as a player does, and pile up errors. "Silk" O'Loughlin had such a day at St. Louis once when he seemed to call everything wrong. Finally he called Wallace out. "What for, 'Silk'?" demanded Wallace.

"Well, you see," explained the umpire, "I really thought you were safe, but wanting to get one decision right, I called you out."

The phrase "senseless kicking" is widely used and is redundant because all kicking is senseless. It is different from "causeless." The "causeless" kicker always is a bad ball player. The "senseless" kicker may be one goaded to desperation by bad umpiring. In the modern game there is no (at least little) "kicking for effect," such as was indulged in by McGraw, Jennings, Tebeau and O'Connor. The players know they do not gain any advantage and are liable to arouse the retaliatory spirit of the umpire and be put out of the game. Strangely enough, kicking, when there is just cause for complaint, is the most dangerous kind. An umpire seldom expels a player for causeless kicking. He drives him out for objecting to decisions which he knows were wrong, and is therefore angry with himself.

Some expulsions are laughable. In 1908, Pat Dougherty, goaded to a state of frenzy by Hurst's ball and strike decisions, turned upon the umpire and said, "You blank, blank, blankety blanked blank crook."

"Do you think I am that sort of a crook, Patrick?" asked Hurst.

"Yes, blank blank you, I do," spluttered the angry player.

"Then, Patrick," said Hurst in his softest voice, "if I were you I would not associate with such a person. Git on off the field."

Muzzling players completely is merely placing a premium on weak umpires because the modern player does not kick against good umpires who have their confidence and respect. Some umpires attempt to rule by bullying players and misusing their power. The worst scenes in modern baseball have resulted from the aggressiveness of the umpire. The good umpires, who have tact, usually admit to the angry players that they might have been wrong, and in almost every case the player retires satisfied.

Clean aggressiveness must remain a part of the game, for it is necessary to keep a team fighting for every point and the spectators demand it. Modern major league players outside the "bonehead" class, understand the difficulties of the umpire's position and sympathize with him as long as he appears to be trying. Minor league players will assure you that the umpires in their leagues do not get half what is coming to them, and in many leagues the same process of suppressing rowdyism that the major leagues went through is going on. What some of the "bush league" umpires will decide really is astounding, and what they must endure from the players would rejoice the heart of the old-time "fan" of the "kill him," "take him out" epoch.

There was an umpire at Evansville, Ind., in 1908, who called a game on account of darkness at 3:26 p. m., the moment the Evansville team scored a run and went ahead. Schmidt, when managing the Meridian, Miss., team passed himself off as an umpire and was caught stealing the opposing catcher's signals, signaling his own batters and base-runners, and then miscalling balls and strikes as fast as they were pitched in a vain effort to make his minor leaguers beat a major league club.

One of the best comparisons between the umpiring in major and minor leagues was given unconsciously by "Ducky" Holmes, who, after years of service in major leagues, retired to manage the Lincoln, Neb., club. After the third game he pleaded with "Bill" Rourke, with tears in his eyes, to lend him a revolver with which to kill an umpire.

Years ago there was an umpire who, in a game at Quincy, Ill., called a runner out at the plate in the ninth inning, ending the game and giving the visiting club the victory. The crowd, angered by the decision, made a rush but he escaped, and fleeing with a hundred men and boys pursuing, leaped into a passing delivery wagon, implored the driver to save him, and escaped to the hotel. Before he could dress and flee, the angry crowd surrounded the hotel threatening lynching. He hid in a room on the top floor. Night came and still the crowd, muttering threateningly, remained on guard. At 11 o'clock the umpire raised the window of his room and cautiously stuck out his head.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he yelled, "I reverse my decision. The run counts."

The crowd dispersed and his life was saved.

Abe Pollock, who umpired a few frenzied games in the Central league, quit abruptly and tells the following story in explanation—President Carson entering strenuous denial.

"I stood everything," Pollock groaned. "They spiked my feet, hit me in the eye, waylaid me after games, kicked me on the shins, pulled my hair, abused and cursed me. Still I stuck until one day at Fort Wayne when a big fellow down to the front of the stand, dropped a big bulldog over into the field and yelled, 'Sic him;' then I resigned."

The worst feature of an umpire's life, perhaps, is the necessity of avoiding every one and concealing one's identity as far as possible. During the season the umpires travel incognito, if possible, and keep their hotels secret except to the presidents of their leagues; avoid players and all conversation with outsiders, practically exiling themselves. These precautions are necessary because irresponsible persons are likely to start false stories. O'Day and McGraw on Broadway one morning and walked two blocks with him. Before the game started, the "tin horn" element along Broadway was betting on New York on the report that "McGraw had it fixed," which was started by some one who saw the umpire and player speak to each other. In St. Louis an umpire was accosted in his hotel by a stranger, who seemed to know him.

"What do you think of the race?" asked the stranger.

"Pretty close," replied the umpire.

"Think New York will win?"

"They have a good chance."

"Is New York a good bet?"

"As good as any in baseball."

Three days later the president of the league received a letter stating that the umpire was betting heavily that New York would win the pennant.

On the afternoon that New York and Chicago played off their tie for the National league championship of 1908, the rumor ran all over New York that the game was fixed for New York to win. Tinker was called from the Chicago bench an hour before the game and advised to save himself by betting on New York because the umpires were fixed, and offers to get large sums were made at all saloons, and in the Polo grounds itself on the strength of the rumor. When the Kreamer case was exposed, months later, the probable origin of the rumor was revealed.

The umpires are compelled to avoid the slightest appearance of evil or accusations will arise. Still an umpire may have friends, Comiskey to the contrary notwithstanding. Once Comiskey was angry with Cantillion, who then was an umpire. The previous day Cantillion's decisions had aroused the crowd against him, and when the umpire came to the gate with two other men, the gatekeeper, a bitter Chicago partisan, refused to admit the men Cantillion had invited to attend the game. Comiskey appeared.

"Umpire is here with two friends," said the gateman. "Shall I let them in?"

"Any umpire who has two friends ought to bring them," snorted Comiskey, "they are all he has."

The life of an umpire is graphically described in J. Peck Sharp's version of the manner in which Jack Sheridan entered the profession.

"Jack had been playing in the Southern league," relates Sharp, "and Oakland purchased him. Great stories had been told of his ability to field, and before the season opened the Oakland papers were printing two columns a day telling how good he was. The season opened; Sheridan did not come. Urgent telegrams were sent. The team lost steadily. The people cried: 'Give us Sheridan.' More telegrams, money, tickets, still more telegrams, and finally Sheridan came rushing to the rescue. The papers printed seven-column headlines announcing his arrival, and all the people in the city poured out to see Oakland start to win the pennant. The first afternoon Sheridan made four errors, the next day six, the next seven, and when the game ended the crowd chased him for miles. He fled on and on until at last he came to a dense forest, and in that he hid by day and fled by night.

"On the third day he came to the great redwood groves and stumbled upon a lumber camp. The foreman fed him and gave him a job. The next morning he was given an ax and a team of oxen, and the foreman, taking him into the forest, marked two redwoods for him to chop down. Sheridan set to work, hacking around and around the giant tree like an Indian with a tomahawk. At dusk when the foreman came to help him haul the trees, Sheridan had not chopped through the first one. The foreman accused him of loafing. Sheridan, with blistered hands and aching muscles, retorted angrily. While they quarreled the tree fell, killing both oxen. The foreman, seizing an ax, leaped toward Sheridan to kill him. Again Sheridan turned and fled. For days he fled on and on, deeper and deeper into the forest. Hiding by day for fear of being seen by some watchful Native Son, and slinking through the forest by night, he lived on roots, barks and berries. Twelve days he wandered. One afternoon he threw himself exhausted upon the ground, his mind filled with bitter thoughts.

"'What is left for me?' he soliloquized mournfully, 'driven from the haunts of man, forced to hide and skulk through the bushes like a hunted animal. Scorned, beaten, despised by my fellow man; hated; an Ishmael and outcast. Why shouldn't I make a good umpire?'"

One night a few years ago "Silk" O'Loughlin had the blues and was discanting upon the bitterness of an umpire's life.

"It's a dog's life," he said. "Worse than that, for sometimes persons speak kindly to dogs. Even a criminal, a murderer, is more respected and better treated. We are outcasts, pariahs, things to be abused and insulted. Why, from 3 o'clock every afternoon, until after 5, we stand out there with 10,000 persons abusing, insulting—"

"Yis," remarked Hurst, "but can yez beat thim hours!"